51
.71/4
:802
ROOM USE ONLY
DO NOT CIRCULATE

Elliott Abrams

Permanent Dictatorship in Nicaragua?

Current Policy No. 802

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.

MAR 2 9 1986

The following is from a statement by Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, before the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, D.C., March 5, 1986.

I would like to discuss our policy toward Nicaragua as it affects a complex of issues that has been of particular concern to me during much of my government career—human rights.

We here in Washington have been justly pleased during the last month about the role our government played in supporting developments that have advanced human rights in Haiti and in the Philippines. Those directly involved are probably the only ones who know just how much had to be done to help ensure favorable outcomes. But act they did, and they and you, as Members of Congress, deserve to share in the praise. It is a cause both branches of government have actively supported.

Over the past several years, we have also heard comment, from citizens as well as from Administration officials, about the importance of supporting human rights in Central America. Some truly historic gains have been made in El Salvador and in Guatemala: there has been a lot of credit to share. And I don't think there is a person in this room who has not applauded the progress that has taken place in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil over the past 2 years.

I suggest that we should be no less committed to human rights in Nicaragua. That there are major human rights problems in Nicaragua is not at issue. Recent events in Nicaragua—including abuses committed by the armed resistance as well as those committed by the Sandinista regime and its enforcers—are summarized in the latest White House *Report on Nicaragua*, dated February 4, 1986.

The question is, what are we going to do about it? These problems are not going to go away by themselves. It is a fact of life that, absent the pressures that alone seem to restrain them, the Sandinistas will not turn about and negotiate away the absolute power they have ardently gathered for the past 6½ years.

The resistance is another fact of life: a fighting force some 20,000 strong—20,000 citizens of Nicaragua who have taken it upon themselves to fight the repressive regime in Managua. There is no turning back for them. It is illusory to assume that peace will come to Nicaragua if we abandon them.

It is equally illusory to assume that military assistance for the democratic resistance will contribute only to human rights abuses. If properly led, trained, and equipped, the armed resistance will be better able to function as a disciplined force during military operations. El Salvador's Army showed that, with reliable U.S. assistance, it can be done. The United States expects the Nicaraguan resistance to follow a code of conduct on the battlefield that will protect noncombatants and prisoners.

The President has specifically designated $3 million of the $100 million request for aid to the Nicaraguan democratic resistance exclusively for the strengthening of the observance and advancement of human rights. Consistent and sustained U.S. backing, combined with strong internal monitoring within the resistance forces themselves,

can improve human rights performance and minimize suffering among noncombatants.

Nicaragua is a real problem for us. We must face it. Neither the assault on democracy nor the fight for freedom will wait for the Washington calendar. Neither posturing nor passivity will bring about a solution.

It is never easy to bring about constructive change in this world. It is usually a messy business, fraught with difficult choices. But we have been making the right choices—in favor of democracy and human rights—in the Philippines, in Haiti, in South America, in Guatemala, in El Salvador.

We must stand by the same principles in Nicaragua and support the resistance that is fighting for democracy and human rights.

Or are we prepared to suggest that, unlike Marcos, Duvalier, or some Argentine generals, the Sandinistas have succeeded in consolidating their dictatorship? That they are now free to spread totalitarianism and terrorism to Central and South America from a secure base on the mainland?

We have just now all agreed that permanent dictatorship is not inevitable in Haiti or the Philippines. The question now facing the Congress is whether we are to accept that communist dictatorship will be permanent in Nicaragua. ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs
Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • March 1986
Editor: Colleen Sussman • This material is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission; citation of this source is appreciated.

READEX FICHE